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Evolution of Language

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SHORT SUMMARY OF OTTO JESPERSEN'S

"LANGUAGE, ITS NATURE, DEVEL-

OPMENT, AND ORIGIN" - *pages 6-19*

BY

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EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE

INTRODUCTORY.

Just one hundred years ago Jacob Grimm published his great work on phonology. It is not unfitting then to speak this afternoon on some branch of linguistics; above all when the year has been signalized by the publication of another great work. I refer to Otto Jespersen's *Language, its Nature, Development and Origin*. From this book I have taken the material of my address.

Professor Jespersen is always stimulating, and it would be hard to find a dull page. He is courageous too. More than one old theory has been taken down from the shelves, dusted, and renovated. A few illuminating comments make us realize that, after all, these neglected problems must be faced again, and that our predecessors were nearer the mark than some of us had thought. Take, for instance, such topics as the origin of language, or attempts to construct a universal language. Both these topics appear in Jespersen's book: the former is fully discussed in his last chapter; the latter is mentioned, with approval, on more than one page*; and

* *Pref.*, p. 9. 'Is it possible to construct an artificial language on scientific principles for international use? On this question I may here briefly state my conviction that it is extremely important for the whole of mankind to have such a language, and that *Ido* is scientifically and practically very much superior to all previous attempts, Volapük, Esperanto, Idiom Neutral, Latin sine flexione, etc'. See, too, p. 99.

Jespersen, when lecturing at London University in June, 1920, said: '*Ido* has attained such a high degree of perfection that I should not hesitate in advocating its adoption as the official language of the League of Nations'.

yet only fifty-six years ago, when *La Société de Linguistique* was founded in Paris, the statutes of the Society expressly stated that 'The Society shall receive no communication either on the origin of language or on the creation of a universal speech.' This attitude has been fashionable until our own day.

Then again, the old view, which Dr. John Peile, of Christ's College, Cambridge, made popular, that phonetic changes are largely due to laziness, is sanely defended after many years of contemptuous neglect.

LATIN ORDER OF WORDS.

In the chapter entitled 'Progress,' Jespersen once more shows himself the champion of non-inflexional languages. On the whole we are led to agree with him; but not all his examples are equally convincing. For instance (p. 350), he compares the Latin *opera virorum omnium bonorum veterum* with the English *all good old men's works*, much to the disadvantage of the Latin. As for this Latin, we may fairly say that it is somewhat uncouth: a Roman would have written *opera omnium senum bonorum* or *omnium opera senum bonorum*. These are at least intelligible and can be understood in one way only. But what are we to say of 'all good old men's works'? In writing, the words are quite ambiguous; for they mean any one of four things: (1) all works of good old men; (2) all good works of old men; (3) all good old works of men; (4) works of all good old men.

Thus, as in Chinese, one may pay too dearly for the loss of case-endings. The fact is that Englishmen do not always perceive how much they depend on intonation and enunciation to make themselves intelligible. If we go too far in this dependence, we may find ourselves with such words as the Chinese *ta*, which, according to the musical tone, may signify great, much, magnitude, enlarge.

But loss of case-endings and of concord is not the only cause of ambiguity. Take, for example, the four words 'I cannot walk there.' This sentence, according to intonation, may mean four different things: (1) *I* cannot walk there (but you can); (2) *I-cannot* walk there (even if I want to); (3) I cannot *walk* there (but I can ride); (4) I cannot walk *there* (but I can walk part of the distance). Latin, however, can show all the last three meanings by *order*, while the first is expressed by inserting *ego*. Thus we write for (1) *ego eo ambulare non possum*; for (2) *non possum eo ambulare*; for (3) *ambulare eo non possum*; for (4) *eo non possum ambulare*.

This use of abnormal order as a means of emphasizing the word of interest has hardly received the attention it deserves. Quinctilian himself recognized the principle (see his *Inst. Orat.*, ix, 4, 29), and modern scholars, notably Dr. J. P. Postgate, have illustrated it in greater detail. I respectfully join issue with Prof. Jespersen when he states, on p. 350, that 'in Horace's well-known aphorism: *aequam memento rebus in arduis | servare mentem*, the flexional form of *aequam* allows him to place it first, far from *mentem*, and thus facilitates for him the task of building up a perfectly metrical line.' The assumption that Horace separated *aequam* from *mentem* by five words for metrical convenience is not, in my opinion, justified by facts. If here we regard *memento* as parenthetic, and if we remember that a single word after the verb (*mentem* in our passage) is a commonplace of all Latin, we find that Horace has written *aequam rebus in arduis mentem*—a grouping quite usual in prose, save for the slight anastrophe *rebus in*. Thus by the insertion of *memento* Horace has given *aequam* sufficient stress to prepare us for the antithesis *arduus*.

We have too long accepted without question this old plea of 'metrical convenience.' How needless such a defence

may be is seen in Horace's *Odes*, iii, 6, 5, *dis te minorem quod geris imperas*, where the poet could have written, had he so desired, either *quod te minorem dis geris*, or *quod dis minorem te geris*, or *dis quod minorem te geris*, or *te quod minorem dis geris*. Why Horace preferred what he has written, I have tried to show in my note *ad loc.**

Prof. Jespersen also quotes *Aen.* iv, 539, *et bene apud memores veteris stat gratia facti*, and comments as follows: 'the form shows that *veteris* is to be taken with *facti* (but then, where does *bene* belong? It might be taken with *memores*, *stat* or *facti*).' This line, however, illustrates not a weakness, but a positive virtue which Latin and similar languages possess. I mean, of course, the particular order known as *coniunctio*. Here *veteris* is governed equally by *memores* and *gratia*: it is easy to remember a *recens factum*, but not so easy to remember a *vetus factum*. Hence the juxtaposition of *memores* and *veteris*. Furthermore, the grouping *veteris . . . gratia facti* occurs regularly in prose and poetry*, and the interposition of a verb is not at all infrequent, e.g., *Odes*, i, 18, 7, *modici transiliat munera Liberi*, etc. In our Vergilian passage, the position of *stat* serves a double purpose: it brings *veteris* with emphasis close to *memores*, and gives weight to the sense of *stat*, i.e., stands firm, immovable, permanent. For other cases of *stat* placed early for emphasis, compare *Odes*, ii, 9, 5, *nec Armeniis in oris*, | *amice Valgi, stat glacies iners*; iii, 3, 42, *stet Capitolium* | *fulgens*; and *Cic. Acad. Pr.*, ii, 1, 3, *ut hodie stet Asia Luculli institutis servandis*, i.e., 'Asia owes her stability to maintaining the ordinances of Lucullus.'

As for *bene*, again an advantage of Latin over English is illustrated. The adverb, placed thus early, influences all that follows, at least up to the verb, much as does a negative (compare my note in *Odes*, ii, 9, 13). In other

* See my *Horace, Odes and Epodes*, Camb. Univ. Press, 1922.

words, we may say that *bene* belongs alike to *memores*, *veteris*, and *stat*. For *bene*, being the opposite of *male* with adjectives, merely intensifies the meaning of *memores* and *veteris*, and with *stat* also differs little from *valde*. In much the same way the *bene* of *Odes* ii, 12, 15 (*bene mutuis fidum pectus amoribus*) colours both *mutuis* and *fidum*.

On p. 334 Prof. Jespersen discusses the merits of analytical forms. The analysis, for example, of *cantaveram* into the speech group 'I had sung' has advantages, but these are due to stress and intonation. Thus 'I *had* sung (before you came),' and 'I had *sung* (but not recited),' are differences easily heard, but not shown in writing, unless italics are used. Latin expresses the former by *iam cantaveram*, and the latter by putting *cantaveram* first in the sentence. We have no right to assume, what has never been proved, that Latin had a stress accent for modifying the sense. Still we may take up Prof. Jespersen's challenge when he asks, 'what would be the Latin equivalent of "Tom never did and never will beat me"?' by answering *is me nec vicit umquam nec vincet*, where the 'conjunction' position of *umquam* is to be noticed, as well as the early grouping of case relations (*is me*)—a grouping which tells us at the start who are concerned and what is their relation. The anxious father who hears the message, 'A lion has seized and carried off your son,' is kept in agony till the last word. Contrast the maximum of information at once given by Latin in *leo filium tuum (captum eripuit)*.

It is true, as our author points out on p. 343, that, while *filios patres amant* is unambiguous, *patres consules amant* is not. But in such a sentence it is permissible to believe that *patres* would be felt as nominative, since the normal order of Latin is subject, object, verb. Were it necessary to stress *patres*, as *filios* above is stressed, a Roman could use the passive—a *patribus consules amantur*—where the

stress by position on *a patribus* would be sufficiently distinct.

As to the words *Horatius et Vergilius poetae Varii amici erant*, it can hardly be maintained that ambiguity exists. No difference in sense is involved whether we take *poetae* as nominative plural or genitive singular: all three were poets, and all three were friends. But supposing we had as subjects *Augustus et Maecenas*, then it would be necessary to write *Varii poetae*; otherwise we might seem to class Augustus and Maecenas among the poets. We are, however, bound to admit that inflexional languages are not always exempt from ambiguities, but the same must also be said of non-inflexional languages. English too may set us wondering, even when we have the full sentence, as in the notorious proposition, 'Time flies, you cannot: they pass at such irregular intervals.'*

Still, whatever virtues an inflexional language may possess, we are not justified in assuming that inflexions imply superior intelligence. It suffices to remember that the Bantu languages of South Africa have a most complicated system of inflexions, which make Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin seem simplicity itself.

HISTORICAL—BEGINNING OF NINETEENTH CENTURY.

Although the name of Jacob Grimm is always associated with the discovery of the 'sound shift' which, since the time of Max Müller, has been called 'Grimm's Law,' Jespersen reminds us that the credit of this discovery should be given rather to Rasmus Rask, of Copenhagen. Rask, in his prize essay on the origin of the Old Norse Language, published

* Among other vexations are 'after' and 'before', used both as prepositions and as conjunctions. The habit, too, against which Wordsworth protested, of using nouns as adjectives, is one which may become a danger. Lastly, in dictionaries of foreign languages, it is most irritating never to know whether the 'burn', 'turn', 'pour', 'open', etc., are transitive or neuter.

in 1818, enumerates, with one error, of comparative unimportance, all those transitions the discovery of which we are accustomed to attribute to Jacob Grimm. Moreover Grimm's original formula, as Jespersen shows, is neat but entirely incorrect. By including High German and allowing the term 'aspirate' to signify five phonetically disparate things, he achieves a formula which has long been rejected. Had Rask written in a language better known, there is little doubt that we should now be speaking of Rask's Law, rather than Grimm's.

Jespersen by no means accepts Grimm's general view on language. According to Grimm, the history of language shows, on the whole, decline from a period of perfection. But despite this doubtful generalization, Grimm seems to descry, though dimly, the fact that loss of flexional forms is 'sometimes compensated by other things that may be equally valuable or even more valuable.' He is loud in his praises of the English language, which, he says, may justly be called a world language, and is therefore a fit vehicle for 'the greatest poet of modern times.' Very different is the verdict of August Schleicher, who, in 1848, sees in the English tongue 'how rapidly the language of a nation important both in history and literature can decline.'

MIDDLE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY.

The greatest name in the period from 1850-70 is that of August Schleicher. He divides languages into isolating, agglutinative, and flexional, and seems to assume that flexional languages are the very flower of linguistic development. Such clear-cut formulas are always attractive, especially when they flatter national prejudices. Jespersen points out the unsatisfactory nature of a classification which varies so greatly in its dimensions. For instance, Schleicher's first class comprises only Chinese and its congeners; the second includes 'hundreds of unrelated

languages of the most heterogeneous character'; while the third comprises only two families, Aryan and Semite. As to the second division, agglutinative, Jespersen shows that Finnish possesses not only flexional forms in nouns and verbs, but also shows 'ablaut', as clear as English 'drink', 'drank', in such forms as vanga 'do', perfect venge, and twala 'bring', perfect 'twele'.

But Schleicher's 'most original and important contribution' to the science of linguistics was his reconstruction of Indo-European words. He even went so far as to write an entire fable in this Ursprache. But his assumption that Primitive Aryan had a very simple structure, was exploded a few years after his death, and Gabelentz in 1891 remarked ironically that 'the Aryan Ursprache had changed beyond recognition in the short time between Schleicher and Brugmann'. As to these inferential forms denoted by a star, Jespersen is right in saying that they should be used sparingly and with extreme caution.

END OF NINETEENTH CENTURY.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century saw several discoveries of first-class importance, resulting in a revision of the ablaut theory. But even more important was the recognition of analogy as a factor in the modification of word forms. Much valuable work has also been done during the last forty years in the region of morphology, syntax, and semantics, as well as in sentence phonetics, sentence-stress and sentence-melody. Above all, instead of perpetually looking back, the philologist has more and more turned his attention to the living speech. Among the pioneers in this respect Jespersen mentions with honour the name of Henry Sweet, whose contributions to phonetic science and *History of Language* have won him a high reputation throughout Europe.

CHILD LANGUAGE.

The importance of the living language leads Jespersen to a careful study of child language, to which he devotes a sixth part of his book. Much of the material is probably known to all students of child psychology. Jespersen warns us, and rightly, not to assume much power of generalization in a child. To the child whose pet dog is black, the notion 'dog' will be combined with the notion 'black' much longer than its parents realize, just as 'breakfast', 'lunch', and 'tea' are merely times when the child eats, and are equivalent to the one word 'meal'.

The misunderstandings which arise in the minds of children and continue unrevealed for many years are known to the experiences of everyone who recollects his childhood. How many choir boys have sung 'hast stole our father's leg' for 'hast all our fathers led'? Who does not know the perversion 'bade his tender lass farewell' or 'the child she-bear'? Jespersen has one or two stories which deserve quotation. One English correspondent writes that in singing the lines, 'Teach me to live that I may dread | The grave as little as my bed', he always imagined that the words 'as little as my bed' were descriptive of his future grave, and that it was his duty to fear this grave whose size was no bigger than his bed. One author also quotes a Somerset child who said, 'Moses was not a good boy, and his mother smacked 'un, and smacked 'un, and smacked 'un till she couldn't do it no more, and then she put 'un in the ark of bulrushes'. The child had misunderstood the words in Exodus, 'and when she could *hide* him no longer, she laid him in an ark of bulrushes'. One may be permitted to add 'Solomon's three hundred *columbines*', 'David and *Johnson*', 'Cain and *Mabel*', '*Harold* be Thy name'.

Words which Jespersen calls 'stump-words' are but special cases of a general principle. The mind of a child

cannot hold the whole of a word or of a short sentence. The tendency therefore is to repeat only the last words of the sentence or the last syllable of the word. Thus a child will use Bert for Herbert or Albert, Bella for Arabella, Sandy for Alexander, Lottie for Charlotte, Betty, Bet and Bess for Elizabeth. On the other hand, adults tend to use the early syllables in affectionate abbreviations of names. Readers of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* will remember the nicknames Beau, Bozzy, Lanky, Mur, Sherry, and Goldy. So in our own times we hear Dizzy, Labby, and the like. But, to return to the children, Jespersen traces such grammar as 'Why you smoke, father?' to mere echoism of sentences like 'Tell me why you smoke'. He adds that 'Not eat that' is merely a child's echo of 'You must not eat that', and explains on this principle the use of the infinitive in 'Nicht hinauslehnen'.

He makes many sound observations, e.g., 'The linguistic development of a child is not always in a steady rising line, but in a series of waves' (a statement which holds true, unless I mistake, of all acquisition of knowledge); again, 'some children develop very rapidly for some years until they have reached a certain point, where they stop altogether'; it is so, he adds, with some races, as with the Negro in America; or again, 'Little girls, on the average, learn to talk earlier and more quickly than boys; they outstrip them in talking correctly; their pronunciation is not spoilt by the many bad habits and awkwardnesses so often found in boys'. 'It has been proved by statistics in many countries that there are far more stammerers and bad speakers among boys and men than among girls and women. The general receptivity of women, their great power of, and pleasure in, imitation, their histrionic talent, if one may so say—all this is a help to them at an early age, so that they can get into other people's way of talking

with greater agility than boys of the same age'. This volubility of women has been commented upon by male observers through the ages. Rosalind says (*As You Like It*, iii, 2, 264), 'Do you not know I am a woman? when I think, I must speak'; in Jespersen's own works 'a woman's thought is no sooner formed than uttered'. He quotes also Oscar Wilde's sneer: 'Women never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly', and the words of a girl in a modern novel, 'I talk so as to find out what I think'.

But I must hasten on and content myself with only enumerating some of the most attractive topics, such as 'Playing at Language', 'Secret Languages', 'Onomatopœia', 'Word-inventions', etc. All these matters lead up to a most interesting chapter, entitled 'New Languages'.

NEW LANGUAGES.

Here Jespersen summarizes the theory of Horatio Hale in his *Origin of Languages*. I cannot do better than quote in full. 'Hale', he says 'was struck with the fact that in Oregon, in a region not much larger than France, we find at least thirty different families of languages living together. It is impossible to believe that thirty separate communities of speechless precursors of man should have begun to talk independently of one another in thirty distinct languages in this district. Hale therefore concludes that the origin of linguistic stocks is to be found in the language-making instinct of very young children. When two children who are just beginning to speak are thrown much together, they sometimes invent a complete language sufficient for all purposes of mutual intercourse, and yet wholly unintelligible to their parents. In an ordinary household, the conditions under which such a language would be formed are most likely to occur in the case of twins. Hale mentions five instances that he has come across of languages framed in this manner by young

children. He concludes: "It becomes evident that, to ensure the creation of a speech which shall be a parent of a new language stock, all that is needed is that two or more young children should be placed by themselves in a condition where they will be entirely, or, in a large degree, free from the presence and influence of their elders. They must, of course, continue in this condition long enough to grow up, to form a household, and to have descendants to whom they can communicate their new speech".

'These conditions he finds among the hunting tribes of America, in which it is common for single families to wander off from the main band. "In modern times, when the whole country is occupied, their flight would merely carry them into the territory of another tribe, among whom, if well received, they would quickly be absorbed. But, in the primitive period, when a vast uninhabited region stretched before them, it would be easy for them to find some sheltered nook or fruitful valley . . . If, under such circumstances, disease or the casualties of a hunter's life should carry off the parents, the survival of the children would, it is evident, depend mainly upon the nature of the climate, and the ease with which food could be procured at all seasons of the year. In ancient Europe, after the present climatic conditions were established, it is doubtful if a family of children under ten years of age could have lived through a single winter. We are not therefore surprised to find that no more than four or five language stocks are represented in Europe. . . . Of northern America, east of the Rocky Mountains and north of the tropics, the same may be said. . . . But there is one region where Nature seems to offer herself as the willing nurse . . . of the feeble and unprotected—California. . . . Need we wonder that, in such a mild and fruitful region, a great number of separate tribes were found,

speaking languages which a careful investigation has classed in nineteen distinct linguistic stocks?" In Oregon, and in the interior of Brazil, Hale finds similar climatic conditions with the same result, a great number of totally dissimilar languages; while, in Australia, whose climate is as mild as that of any of these regions, we find hundreds, perhaps thousands, of petty tribes, as completely isolated as those of South America, but all speaking languages of the same stock—because "the other conditions are such as would make it impossible for an isolated group of young children to survive. The whole of Australia is subject to severe droughts, and is so scantily provided with edible products that the aborigines are often reduced to the greatest straits".

What is true of the Australian language is equally true of the Esquimo languages, which are spoken 'with astonishingly little variation' from Greenland to Alaska. The climatic conditions, as in Finnic-Ugrian territory, are such as to kill in a very short time children who have strayed from the main body. It is therefore not surprising to find that the Finnic-Ugrian languages, though scattered over large spaces, far distant one from another, still preserve a close relationship.

THE GOTHONIC SHIFT.

In another chapter (XI) Jespersen discusses the alleged effect of languages supposed to have been spoken by the inhabitants of territories into which the Aryan people entered. He denies that such original inhabitants are responsible entirely for sound-shifts, like those of Gothic. He sums up with these words: 'It is impossible to ascribe to an ethnic substratum all the changes and dialectal differentiations which some linguists explain as due to this sole cause. Many other influences must have been at work, among which an interruption of intercourse created by

natural obstacles or social conditions of various kinds would be of prime importance'.

LOAN-WORDS.

We now pass naturally to the topic of loan-words. Jespersen acutely remarks that in learning a foreign language we strive to speak that language as purely as possible; on the other hand, we rather delight in borrowing words from some cultivated foreign source. This serves in some measure to explain why so few Keltic words have survived in French and English: 'There was nothing to induce the ruling classes to learn the language of the inferior natives: it could never be fashionable for them to show an acquaintance with a despised tongue by using now and then a Keltic word. But the Kelt would have to learn the language of his masters and learn it well; and he would even among his comrades like to show off his knowledge by interlarding his speech with words and turns from the language of his betters'.

Loan-words are divided by Jespersen into three groups. First, some special thing or product wanted by some other nation and not produced in that country. Here the native name is taken over with the thing, e.g., *wine* from Italy, *tea* from China, *coffee* from Arabia, *chocolate* from Mexico, and *punch* from India, *coach* from Hungary, *bamboo* from *Malay*, and so on. Secondly, words which imply superior culture in the creditor nation, e.g., *zero*, *algebra*, *zenith* from Arabic, *piano*, *allegro*, *soprano* from Italian, and from the same source, *bank*, *balance*, *traffic*. Indeed, one language may for so long a period imbibe the cultural influence of another that hardly a sentence expressing more than ordinary material needs is pronounced without the introduction of words borrowed from the superior nation. A clear instance is English since the influxion of classical words. The Basques, with their poverty of words to

express general ideas, have borrowed freely from Spain. For example, while they have names by which to designate particular trees, they have no generic term and are driven to use *arbolia*. So 'colour' is *colore*, and 'flower' is *lore*, while ideas associated with stable government are no less Spanish, e.g., 'king' = *errege*, and 'law' = *lege*. Thirdly and lastly, words are often needlessly introduced by translators too lazy to think of the native equivalent.

Numerals are rarely borrowed save in the case of games and where the native forms are clumsy and obscure. Keltic numerals for counting sheep were, some hundred years ago, regularly used by the Danish settlers of Cumberland, and up to 1882 they were still heard on the lips of old people. The Eskimo with his 'third toe on the second foot of the fourth man' has wisely adopted the Danish words for 100 and 1,000. Most rare is the taking over of personal pronouns or the like, and, since English has adopted *they*, *them*, *their*, from Scandinavia, we must assume an almost complete fusion of the two races. 'The invaders and the original population would to some extent be able to make themselves understood . . .'. Hence in Middle English we find so many double forms of the same word, one English and the other Scandinavian. Some of these, with differentiation of meaning, have survived to this day, e.g., *whole*, *hale*; *shirt*, *skirt*, etc.

Whitney's dictum that there is no such thing as a language with a mixed grammatical apparatus is regarded by Jespersen as an exaggeration—a word which his examples in Chapter XI, par. 12, fully justify. Translation from foreign languages often has a permanent effect on idioms. Thus 'the accusative and infinitive construction, which had a very restricted use in Old English, has very considerably extended its domain through Latin influence, and the so-called "absolute construction" (nominative

absolute) . . . seems to be entirely due to imitation of Latin syntax'. On the other hand, many borrowed phrases are sterile; as, for instance, 'That goes without saying': no one dreams of using 'That goes without telling'.

PIDGIN-ENGLISH.

Chapter XII deals with various forms of Pidgin-English. Those used in the Western Pacific and China are, says Jespersen, nothing else than 'English learnt imperfectly, in consequence partly of the difficulties always inherent in learning a totally different language, partly of the obstacles put in the way of learning by the linguistic behaviour of the English-speaking people themselves', who talk to natives, as if they were babies, with errors of pronunciation, extreme simplification of grammar, and scantiness of vocabulary.

It is curious to find what may be called the subjective middle of Greek (*aisthanesthai*, *dianoesthai*, etc.) expressed in Pidgin by the preposition 'inside'. Thus 'to consider' becomes *inside tell himself* (*logizesthai*, *phasthai*), 'to be startled' becomes *jump inside* (*ptoeisthai*), 'to perceive' becomes *to feel inside* (*aisthanesthai*, *dianoesthai*), and 'to change one's mind' becomes *to feel another kind inside* (*metabouleuesthai*).

There is always a danger of assuming the existence of native words which, on later investigation, turn out to be no more than corruptions of English. Thus *liklik* in Beach-la-mar, though said to be derived from a Polynesian *liki*, is much more probably a perversion of our *little*. Similarly (says Jespersen in a footnote), the missionary, G. Brown, thought that *tobi* was a native word of the Duke of York islanders for 'wash', till one day he accidentally discovered that it was their pronunciation of English *soap*. One cannot resist quoting Pidgin-English for bishop. It is necessary first to remember that *Joss* is derived from Portuguese

Deos, Latin *Deus*, and secondly that *Joss-pidgin* means 'religious talk'. Thus bishop becomes *top-side Joss-pidgin man*. Even more quaint is the effort to say 'Do you know that Englishman with the bald head'? This appears in the following form: 'You no savvy that fellow white man coconut belong him no grass?'

WOMAN AND LANGUAGE.

Jespersen shows reason to doubt the assertion that the Caribbean women of the little Antilles speak a language entirely different from that of their husbands. When we remember how the women never eat in the company of their husbands and never mention them by name, it becomes probable that tabu is at the bottom of admitted differences of vocabulary. Again, in the case of competing languages there are special reasons why the men should, as with German and Scandinavian immigrants in America, learn English better than the women, and ultimately cease to speak their native tongue. Similarly, owing to conscription, the Basque soldier tends to abandon his language for French, although the wife may talk Basque only. In the old Indian drama women talk Prakrit (the spoken dialect), while men speak Sanskrit (the obsolete language of gods and heroes).

On the whole, women tended to be more conservative in words and pronunciation. They preferred softer sounds also, and a mincing utterance. Jespersen mentions that women were responsible for the weakening of the fully trilled tongue-point 'r'. This sound is plainly suited to outside life; the home-keeping lady of the 16th century in France reduced it to the English untrilled 'r' and even to 'z'. In the pronunciation of present-day English there are few differences between the sexes. Professor Daniel Jones writes that men say 'sawft' and women 'soft'; that women mostly say 'gairl' and men 'gurl'; and that men say

‘wesket’, while women say ‘waiskote’. But one may be permitted to have doubts.

As to choice of words—there are more convincing illustrations. We may agree that women use the word ‘*person*’ in order to avoid ‘lady’, where they think ‘lady’ unsuitable, and that ‘*common*’ for ‘vulgar’ is a feminine peculiarity. Professor Jespersen asserts that woman objects to anything that smacks of bad language. With her, ‘He told an infernal lie’ becomes ‘He told a most dreadful fib’, and so on. He does not forget, however, that ‘many young ladies have begun to imitate their brothers’ in respect of swearing. He quotes, on the other hand, a friend, who tells him that ‘The best Englishmen hardly swear at all . . . I imagine some of our fashionable women now swear as much as the men they consort with’. The fact seems to be that women’s entrance into the smoke-room has tended to lower her rather than to raise the standard of her new environment. But, after all, vigour of expression is not unneeded in a language, and, personally, I should regret the loss of such lines as ‘The Devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon’. Thus the man is the chief invigorator of language. Through him *weorpan* was superseded successively by *cast*, *throw*, and *fling*. Shakespeare’s ‘They cast their caps up’ could hardly fail to sound tame on modern lips. Lord Chesterfield blamed the women of his day for the wearisome iteration of *vastly* in *vastly* obliged, *vastly* offended, *vastly* glad, *vastly* sorry, and even *vastly* little; and Jespersen seems to attribute to the woman’s love of hyperbole such curiosities as *terribly nice*, *awfully pretty*. I dare not suggest that she is responsible for the veritable nonsense of *pretty ugly*, *precious cheap*, and *jolly miserable*.

As to literary form, women are said to prefer parataxis, men hypotaxis; that is to say, women will write a series of short sentences, while men can find their way through the

mazes of an involved period. In general, says Jespersen, the highest linguistic genius and the lowest degree of linguistic imbecility are very rarely found among women. Genius indeed is more common among men than among women. This dogma is offensive to women, but they do not question the companion statement that idiocy is more frequent among men.

CAUSES OF CHANGE.

In Chapter XIV Jespersen deals with causes of change. Modifications of anatomical structure, climatic conditions, national psychology—these he does not regard as very important. It is surprising to find no mention of the vowels which decorate the British-Australian dialect. To say that they are Cockney is to destroy any theory of climatic influence. Rather we may hold that '*paiper*' for '*paper*' is the result of weariness, in Australia due to heat, in London due to reiteration. A London newspaper boy was calling the 'Westminster Gazette' as *Westminister*. A gentleman protested, and the boy replied, 'If you had to shout the blasted thing all afternoon, you'd say *Westminister*'. The boy was right: '*Henery*' is easier to repeat continually than '*Henry*,' and so is '*umberella*' than '*umbrella*'.

Sweet, however, considers that the Cockney drawl in 'now', for instance, is due to 'the habit of speaking with a constant smile or grin', and Jespersen seems to approve. But what the Cockney has to smile or grin at is beyond my comprehension. This leads to Jespersen's revival of the Ease Theory, to which I referred in my opening words. He takes the sensible line that an 'all or nothing' attitude is indefensible, that 'a tendency towards ease may be at work in some cases, though not in all, because there are other forces which may at times neutralize it or prove stronger than it'. The principle is illustrated every day when we

pronounce 'know' as 'no,' 'psychology' as 'saikology', and 'pneumatics' as 'newmatics'. We reach the extreme limit of the Ease Theory when we use 'see?' for 'do you see?', and a score of similar short cuts. Other causes of change are emotional exaggerations ('Gawd' for 'God'); lapses and blendings (French '*chercher*' for older '*sercher*'); '*fugleman*' for '*flügelmann*'; '*averse to*' on the analogy of '*opposed to*'. *

HOMOPHONES.

Jespersen has little dread of confusion, in English, arising from homophones. Fortunately most of them are different parts of speech. Real confusion can only occur with such pairs as 'beach', 'beech', 'breach', 'breech', 'mead', 'meed', 'peace', 'piece', 'peal', 'peel', and some eight others. But such confusion disappears when the sentence, in whole or part, has been heard. It is curious to note that several of these words are poetical or rare or obsolete. The fact remains, however, that we have too many homophones. Perhaps Tom Hood would differ from us, and so would the race of punsters in general. Still we need not dread the early demise of the verb *know*, because it sounds like *no*, or because its third person *knows* may be confused with *nose*, or because its past tense *knew* is pronounced as *new*.

The last section on 'Causes of Change' deals briefly with slang. Jespersen has an etymology of the verb 'rag' (= reprove severely) which deserves mention. In old slang the tongue was called '*the red rag*'; this was shortened into '*the rag*'; hence the verb was formed, meaning to give someone a bit of one's tongue. Similar is the history of *jaw*.

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ETYMOLOGY.

The chapter on Etymology contains a much-needed warning. While much has been done in the direction of scientific accuracy, it must not be imagined that we have always got beyond 'happy thoughts'. Let us remind ourselves that etymologists have despaired of solving such common words as *fit*, *put*, *cut*, *rouse*, *pun*, *fun*, *job*. It is almost disconcerting to find that words comparatively recent, such as *race*, *baron*, *zinc*, are completely enigmatic.

Most refreshing is the courage with which Jespersen refuses to submit to old shibboleths, such as 'Phonetic Laws have no exceptions'. He quotes several instances of words to which nothing but perversity would deny etymological connexion. But may not the Greek *hebdomos*, with its *b* and *d* for *p* and *t* be explained as due to the influence of the voiced *m*? An original '*heptmos*' would easily pass into '*hepdmos*', '*hebdmos*', and '*hebdomos*', and then would infect with voiced stops the following '*ogdoos*'; just as '*quattuor*' helped to change '*penque*' into '*quinque*.' Much more courage, perhaps, is required in describing as 'barbarity and phonological pedantry' the refusal to connect English *nut* with Latin *nux*.

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ERRATUM.

p. 21, tenth line from foot, after the words 'with a stop,'
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The section on blendings (Lewis Carroll's 'portmanteau words') is of peculiar interest. The examples, if we omit slang, begin, almost all, with a stop[^] followed by a liquid, e.g., blot=blemish+spot, plot, dot; flush=flash+blush; slender=slim+tender, and so on. Equally bold is Jespersen's defence of etymologies based on imitative originals. His remarks on *plumbum* deserve quotation. 'Most etymologists', he writes, 'take it for granted that *plumbum* is a loan-word, some being honest enough to confess that they do not know from what language, while others without the least scruple or hesitation say that it was taken from Iberian: our ignorance of that language is so deep that no

one can enter an expert's protest against such a supposition'. The simple explanation is that *plumbum* is imitative, like *plummet*, *plonger*, and *plunge*.

The final chapters of this great book deal with the topics of Progress and Decay in language, of the merits or demerits of Synthesis and Analysis, of Concord, Case-endings, and the like. Jespersen believes that we are blundering along to something better and not worse. He sums up thus: 'That Language ranks highest which goes furthest in the art of accomplishing much with little means, or, in other words, which is able to express the greatest amount of meaning with the simplest mechanism'. We have already seen how the desire for ease has simplified pronunciation; the same desire has shortened words, and without producing any serious consequence, e.g., '*cupboard*' and '*blackguard*', *England* for *Englaland*, *idolatry* for *idololatry*, and *had* for Gothic *habaidedeima*. We English have still a few verbal inflexions, and, to be frank, they are often a nuisance. Who has not boggled over 'either you or I *are* wrong', 'either you or I *am* wrong', 'either you are wrong or I (sc. *am*)'? Dean Alford proposed a solution 'either you or I *is* wrong'. How gladly then do we seek refuge in evasion by using verbal forms that never change, e.g., 'either you or I *must* be, *may* be. wrong'! In fine, we can pay too dearly for the devices of inflexional languages. There is, however, one thing to fear, viz., the danger of making language tame and monotonous. Even the most stubborn of anti-Latinists will admit the musical charm (save when spoken at Oxford) of such lines as '*Eheu fugaces, Postume, Postume | Labuntur anni nec pietas moram | Rugis et instanti senectae | Afferet indomitaeque morti*'; or '*ut pura nocturno renidet | Luna mari*' |, and a thousand others. No Germanic languages can continually reach such beauty of vowel changes, hung delicately together without the horrors

of cacophonies like trudge, scotch, loch, and 'motley-mantled' for '*poikileimon*'. Perhaps more might have been said by our author on the comparative musical merits of European languages. For myself, I should put Italian very high, perhaps highest; and yet even Italian can spoil the beauty of Shakespeare's 'my little body is aweary of this great world' by writing '*il mio piccolo corpo è stanco di questo gran mondo*'.

Rigidity of word order has without question helped towards clarity. Gray *did* write 'And all the air a solemn stillness holds', but the excuse is that it matters little whether stillness holds the air, or the air holds stillness. Inversion is not frequent, I believe, in the best poetry, and we may be thankful. Poetry, viewed linguistically, has quite enough to apologize for.

As for gender (especially of nouns)—no one will regret its absence. Nay, the very indefiniteness of, for instance, 'who?' means greater precision, and Jespersen is perfectly justified in contrasting the various forms, singular and plural, which Latin requires. In these days when girls and women are so frequently mingled with boys and men, how gladly should we welcome some indefinite pronoun which might save us from the cumbersome 'he or she', 'his or her'. Perhaps some day we may dare to say 'hes' for the former and 'hir' for the latter.

• 'SUPERIORITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES.'

Jespersen well sums up the whole matter of 'the superiority of modern languages' as follows: (1) The forms are generally shorter, thus involving less muscular exertion and requiring less time for their enunciation. (2) There are not so many of them to burden the memory. (3) Their formation is much more regular. (4) Their syntactic use also prevents fewer irregularities. (5) Their more analytic and abstract character facilitates expression

by rendering possible a great many combinations and constructions which were formerly impossible or unidiomatic. (6) The clumsy repetitions known under the name of concord have become superfluous. (7) A clear and unambiguous understanding is secured through a regular word order.

Of course, not every language moves with equal velocity in the above directions, but the general tendency may be called 'a progressive evolution'.

The old conception of an original language consisting of roots is rejected by Jespersen. He gives evidence to show that Chinese, so far from being a support to the old conception, is just the reverse. Apparently Chinese in the 6th century A.D. had a real case distinction.

SOUND SYMBOLISM.

Chapter XX, on sound symbolism, is of absorbing interest. The matter may be summarized thus: We find direct imitation of sounds, whether of animals and men, or water and metal. We have words derived from imitation of the originator of the sound, e.g., cuckoo, peewee, vibe, kibitz, dix-huit; various names for a Frenchman used among native populations, e.g., orang-deedong, dindong, didones, all from *dis-donc*; add wi-wi, man-a-wi-wi, oui-men. At Yokohama, English and American sailors are named Damuraisu. Again, *o* sounds suggest darkness; *i* sounds brightness, e.g., *gloom* but *gleam*; also *i* sounds tend to be used of what is weak and insignificant, dainty and refined, e.g., *little*, *petit*, *piccolo*, *kis*, *wce*, etc. Sufficient examples are cited to show that these and other generalizations are just.

ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE.

Jespersen's last chapter is devoted to the origin of language. He works wisely back from the known to the

unknown. He shows that certain tendencies in all languages point to a time when the earlier forms of these languages were rich in unnecessary vocabulary; when the particular was able to be named but not the general; when phrases and words were long and cumbersome without any counterbalancing advantage of intelligibility. He sums up with this formula: 'The evolution of language shows a progressive tendency from inseparable irregular conglomerations to freely and regularly combinable short elements'. The aborigines of Tasmania had no words representing abstract ideas; for each variety of gum-tree and wattle-tree, etc., they had a name; but they had no equivalent for the expression 'a tree'. English shows traces of this ancient love of superfluous vocabulary when we say with meticulous care, a *flock* of sheep, a *pack* of wolves, a *herd* or *mob* of cattle, a *bevy* of larks (and ladies), a *covey* of partridges, a *shoal* of fish. So with the Mohicans: they have words for cutting various objects, but they cannot say 'cut'. The Zulus have words for 'red cow', 'white cow', etc., but no word for 'cow'. Marett tells us that in Zulu 'my father', 'thy father', 'his-or-her-father' are separate polysyllables without one element in common. The natives of Tierra del Fuego have twenty words, some of four syllables, to express 'he or she'. It is not surprising that a vocabulary of 30,000 words has been drawn up. Certainly we need not envy them such a word as *mamihlapinatapai*, which signifies 'to look at each other hoping that either will offer to do something which both parties desire but are unwilling to do'.

The evidence in general seems unquestionably to support the conclusion which Jespersen draws from it. 'Language', he says, 'began with half-musical unanalyzed expressions for individual beings and solitary events. Languages composed of, and evolved from, such words and quasi-sentences

are clumsy and insufficient instruments of thought, being intricate, capricious and difficult. But from the beginning the tendency has been one of progress, slow and fitful progress, but still progress towards greater and greater clearness, regularity, ease and pliancy'.

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